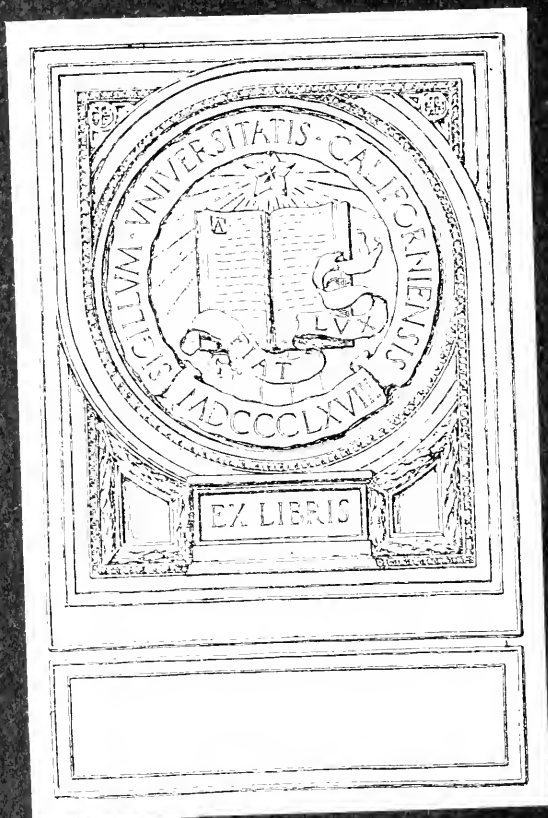


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POEMS

BY

PETER MCBRIEN



DUBLIN: THE CANDLE PRESS
SECOND EDITION. ONE SHILLING NET



POETRY BOOKLETS : NUMBER THREE

POEMS BY PETER MCBRIEN

tri canóla fíoróidí ar fáil do dháil: fíor, áineas, eol.

Three candles that light up every darkness : Truth, Nature, Knowledge.

—THE TRIADS OF IRELAND

P O E M S

BY

PETER MCBRIEN

THE CANDLE PRESS

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To
Lollie May

1905

TO MY WORDS

MY swordsmen and archers of aim never erring, who
Oft gaily went forth to do desperate battle above
Your many-armed strengths on red fields of vain derring-do :
Come, cry me love !

Leal cords of my harp, ever meekly ignoring my
Rude Phantasy's fingers, agrope for Urania's feet,
Though often you heard my forgot songs rush roaring by :
Come, cry me sweet !

Who brave blossomed up from the seeds of me withering :
Blond flowers that shudder your odorous love to a few :
You crystalline patterns of cherubic zithering :
Come, cry me true !

Ai, Ai, I adore you ; the singing birds troop to you ;
What curves paradisal God's artist can draw on your face !
Though Memory falter just when her lips droop to you :
Come, cry me grace !

THE AWAKENING

THROUGH long drab years mine eyes were
muffled by

The sensuousness wherewith one out of two
Blindfolds himself, and laughs, and asks not why.
Nothing but chemics did I see in dew ;

Nothing but future lintels could I read
Into the oak the sculptors' Sculptor carved
With centuried painstaking, just to feed
With Loyalty's dumb sign a spirit starved.

But geo-something conformations were
The Wicklow Mountains to me, as they pushed
Sun-acolyted peaks to Heaven in prayer—
Each note my heart knew in my heart lay hushed.

But, Love, the million-golden'd Autumn burst
Into God's lyric when I saw you first.

AT THE CAFÉ DUNQUERQUE

I PLACED the sugar on the broad, flat blade
Of the pierced silver spoon, and slim Georgette
Spilled the absinthe upon the squares. The jade
Flashed with her loud black eyes (I see them yet)

A snake kiss at me, while her lips formed "Mais,
Tu es très, très gentil, Monsieur Peetaire."
Then lithely round she swung on the array
Of piping atheists she attended there.

And laughs and sweet "C'est vrai's" she flung around
As they grew shrill blaspheming God and priest;
I rang; when she came over at the sound,
I said I was a Catholic. She ceased

To smile, and said intensely: "Vie d' ma vie!"
Grasping my hand in love, "*et moi aussi.*"

THE QUIET EYES OF GOD. I

BENEVOLENCE patted out his forehead smooth :
Poetry curled itself upon his lips :
His soul sobbed pity through his eyes to soothe
His fellow-man struck blind by Joy's eclipse :

He probed what he styled man's *misnomered crime*
With the rough scalpels of slow Royal Commissions :
Some hailed him god come down a second time ;
And Self seemed unbetrothed to his ambitions :

Racial regeneration rioted
Rough through his blood, and clamoured in his brain :
And, frightened by his science, Folly fled ;
And men dropped idle laughter and grew sane :

Feeling the quiet eyes of God one night,
"Curse you !" he snarled, and lo ! his soul took flight.

THE QUIET EYES OF GOD. II

HIS voice was like the roll of summer seas,
And kisses chased the laughter of his curls;
Beauty ran down his face, and to his knees;
His tiger sinews were a snare to girls.

The arrow of his eyes sped down the lane
Of years to come, and, as it flew, lit all
The hedges of futurity; his brain
Shot lightnings he alone knew how to thrall.

And yet his soul was but a little crumb
Of light that glimmered palely, as in doubt,
Through his perfections—merely with his thumb
And finger Satan could have snuffed it out.

The while God's quiet eyes gazed like a knell
Upon his antics down the road to hell.

DUBLIN

HERE, upon ghostly Montpelier, the thousand red
stars of the city

Send me a glance like a hound's softly asking its master
to stay ;

Calm stretch her spires, the old spears of God's sentinels,
muffled in pity,

Fast in the scarves of the night, from the West to the
silver-slashed bay.

Oh, who can say to the lure of her !

She breeds none wise with the wisdom that sits on the
fangs of the serpent ;

Gifts that the nations have sung of their heroes for dark
doth she hide ;

You, when she greets you, just love her—men strode o'er
her limbs to preferment ;

Hands that were foul pierced with sword that was foul
her immaculate side.

Yet naught would I say but what's pure of her.

She is no Babel where Mammon stands huge on the
necks of the tearless ;

She is no siren all smiles for the hot-eyed Don Juans of
the earth ;

Shyly she sits at the feet of the mountains of Wicklow
the fearless ;

In the dim hush of her churches the poor are made rich
at their birth.

Come home : you can always be sure of her.

Queen of a land that was reft of its birthright in ages of
sorrow,
Princelike she bends for her crown, a-quiver to rule her
free race :
Oh, may her Parliament, throned on the Tara of Ireland's
first morrow,
Teach all the world self-control, toleration and reverence
and grace.
God send these be all that endure of her !

HUMILITY

WE hack the grudging entrails of the earth,
To breed out of the poor new miseries,
And fire some millionaire's anæmic mirth ;
Our lamps have scattered panic through the seas ;
The world-long trumpet of our love and hate
Uncoils on ocean's mute and eyeless ooze ;
Fast have we caged the voices of the great—
A sixpence sets them free, no matter whose ;
Like ghostly birds of message, lightning-winged,
Our words flash forth and back from East to West ;
Our frontier-flouting air-fleets, too, have ringed
The feet of Time with lead at our behest :

O sing, Humility, that olden story
Once more, of *Solomon in all his Glory* !

THE HIGHER PESSIMISM

THE smoke of our perfidy lingers
On them that went down in the game ;
The splashes of blood on our fingers
Bespatter the handrails of Fame ;
The scent of those kisses, those kisses,
Is lost in the perfume of these ;
We seal up our eyes to what bliss is,
And feed on Life's bitterest lees.

The bad in the good of the embers
We fan for the heat of our limbs
Is bad for our good : man remembers
That truth in his holiest hymns ;
The bad in the fire of the heart of
Our brothers sets fire to the lust
That lurks in the brilliantest part of
The flames that make God of our dust.

The snake in the jungle gives warning ;
The thunder its banner unfurls
Across the dark brows of the morning
Before its red arrow it hurls ;
The sea writhes and roars for its foison
Before it devours a young ship ;
Man hands me a goblet of poison
With smiles running round its white lip.

There's none to make any the wiser
When man does his best for this earth ;
The things that give tearfullest eyes are
The things that were wombéd in mirth ;
And who's there to say why the highest
In Heaven should here be a clod ?
How glad wilt thou be when thou diest
None knew all thy badness but God !

LIFE

WHAT'S Life?

To strut and sport chef d'oeuvre weeds, and hose
In secondary hues, and brogues with bows :
To bellow "I" the loudest when in strife :
To ermine-stole and toque your plaything wife,
Your vain eyes bragging that the dolly's clothes
(*Bought with an unborn child*) beat so-and-so's :
'S that Life?

Ah, no!

'Tis life to halve your starving plateful with
Some God-loved fool *her* world considers low :
And, loved by none, to none to be a foe,
Since emperors are but the crutchéd kith
Of woe.

ALCAICS

(Adapted from Horace)

WHEN I light candles four to the Immaculate
Maid's statue shrined in Marlboro' Street Church
below,

I do not ask a square mile estate of
Full-breasted Limerick's virgin meadows.

Nor yet for herds that munch on the plains of Meath :
Nor gold torn from the loins of America ;
I ask not sunny valleys wet by
Tranquil-eyed Slaney's untiring kisses.

Let legislators drink of the best of wine
Pressed from the vines sunned where the swart Poitevin
Straights out his back when rings the Angelus,
Telling him Mary has love for workmen.

Our legislators certain of Heaven are :
All of their work is all for the good of all.
I am content at day-time with water—
Stout does me well enough for the night chat.

Grant, Mary, health of body and intellect !
Guard my wee fortune toiled for so grievously !
Grey, keep me pure ; eke give me strength to
Fashion a lyric when friends of mine ask me.

THE POET

THE poet's spirit overtops the sky :
Yea, when he lips Christ's faldstool, planets rock
And the moon bows her olive face to die
On the cloud-catafalque. And though we mock

At his child ignorance, while with his feet
The seas play blindman's buff, yet we drink in
The songs he caught from God-quilled spheres, and eat
The fruit he lets drop from his gaberdine.

For he is clad in Nature's woven coat
Of Truth, and what the millionaire brigades
Have robbed it of is but a sorry groat
Out of its wealth that smiles upon their raids.

And can such grace be married to a will
Whose torted loins give birth to naught but ill ?

TO THE WOMAN WITH THE BEADS

WOMAN, whose horny fingers tingle through
And through with pain, as to the cross they move
Over the beads like pilgrim feet unto
A shrine high-hung ; low-stooping to approve

The pit that waits in peace our phœnix dust,
(Your stoop itself a prayer), Woman, when
With heedless laugh, begot of rough, young lust,
Your children seamed with lines your face which then

Shone like a chaséd chalice holding Blood,
Your life-love for them rose up, angel-wise,
And with its glory dried the tears that stood
Like rain on violets in your poor meek eyes.

Your cruel day has knived your heart where jo !
God's Face appears, to sweeten all your woe.

THE BARLEY FIELD

CHEERED by God's splendid eye, the barley sweeps
In gold-plumed files down to the blinding road ;
Far off, while pines stand guard, the wind-wolf sleeps ;
Lean flank as yet unscarred by Winter's goad.

An endless silence consecrates the air ;
The universe is thrilled in ecstasy
Of adoration, sobbing its soft prayer,
Like some wrapt mystic, all unconsciously.

The skylark's carol is its canticle ;
The binder's rattle is the antiphon ;
The headland-clearing scythe gives versicle ;
Succentor-like, the reapers lead them on.

How far God's might surpasses all our guessing,
That changes thus Man's curse into a blessing !

A CHRISTMAS GIFT

WHEN for the first time Mary gave the wine
Of her child breast to wee Emmanuel
Warming His feet within her palm's pink shell,
Amidst the snowy breathing of the kine
That sat around them patiently, His eyne,
From under their dark lashes' sweet uplift,
Sent her a glance for her own Christmas Gift,
While the great stars sang eve's lone, red decline.

In that look's surging, sorrow-moonéd sea
Of love for who a reckless brow can bare
To Satan's whip, however fierce its whirl,
And face black night as did the Eastern three,
Our young Queen read this consecration there :
Lo, God has made a comrade of a girl !

ENVOI

I HEARD the under whispers of the earth :
Winds strumming to each other on the trees ;
The cloud-wrack calling curlews by waste seas ;
And brooklets sighing in their summer dearth.
I heard the under whispers of the earth :
The whispered prayer beneath the hero's jest ;
The angel's husho by the child at breast
After a girlish mother's first childbirth—

And, Queen of Heaven, they were all of thee.
And though I try to hold them here in chains,
Yet, star-crowned girl, thou only hast the key,
Which thou must turn ere any hear. For me,
Grant, Mary, as the guerdon of my pains
That all may hear, and I may nothing be.

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